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164 842 731 Another possible cause might be the epidemics of some sort of genito-urinary disease which occasionally breaks out. The Lepchas call this disease *tanji*, which is the term used by mission-trained dispensers for gonorrhœa; although some of the symptoms, notably great pain in micturition, a discharge of pus, and occasionally orchitis, are similar, it seems to me more than doubtful if the diagnosis is correct. For one thing the disease comes in epidemics, and seems to attack people indiscriminately, old people and infants as well as adults; on one occasion it is said that the animals also suffered. Again trustworthy people have told me that though they or their spouse had the disease, and though they continued marital copulation, the other spouse was not affected. The discharge lasts for about three weeks, and then clears up automatically, without, as far as is known, leaving any after-effects, nor necessarily recurring. The final argument against its being gonorrhœa is that there was not a single blind baby in the neighbourhood. Whatever the disease may be, it does not inevitably cause sterility for some of the parents of the larger and still growing families had suffered from it. It is possible however that it is a complicating cause. Unlike their neighbours the Nepali, the Lepchas of Zongu do not suffer much from mumps.

842 Since their principal food is grain in one form or another it seems to me that the question of vitamin-E deficiency can be excluded. I think it is worth considering the suggestion that the sterility and very low fertility are due to genetic factors. The Lepchas are a 'pure' race within the meaning of the act, for at any rate in Zongu intermarriage is excessively rare; in Lingthem besides the two supposed bastards there was only one other person not of pure Lepcha blood, and that is Mrs. Tinkep who is three-quarters Sikkimese. Despite their stringent exogamic laws the Lepchas are a relatively inbred community, and if, as seems possible, fertility is genetically determined, it may be that the low reproduction rate of the Lepchas is a genetic characteristic.

163 165 Compared with any of the neighbouring tribes the fertility of those Lepchas who have children is extremely low. Of the thirty-seven women in Zongu who have children still living, only one has produced seven and two six; the average is just over two per fertile woman. Infantile mortality is naturally high, but not, according to the figures I could get, excessively high; most mothers of families seem to have lost one child, but only in three cases have all or most of the children died young. It is possible however that

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my figures may be incomplete on this subject; young children have little emotional importance for Lepchas and dead ones, other than the recently dead, may easily be forgotten.

On the figures available it seems doubtful if the Lepchas of Zongu will be able to maintain their numbers in the future. Out of a total population of 176 in Lingthem, there are twenty girls (who will probably marry outside the village) and ten boys under the age of ten and eighteen boys and eleven girls between the ages of eleven and twenty. At the other end of the scale there are thirty-seven people (or a fifth of the total population) aged fifty or over, including three men and one woman of over eighty.

The Lepchas account for the presence or absence of children chiefly as a matter of luck and the results of former incarnations; there is however a myth accounting for the relatively small size of the Lepcha family as compared with the Nepali; the Lepchas they say have only seven ancestral supernaturals,[18] the Nepalis twelve. I have no complete figures for any of the other villages in Zongu but such information as I received, and such observations as I was able to make, seem to indicate a similar situation throughout the whole reserve. I think the psychological reasons given by Rivers for the breakdown in fertility among the Melanesians, supposing them to be an adequate explanation of the situation there, are inapplicable in Zongu.

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Of the forty-one married couples in Lingthem (the other nineteen married women are either co-wives or widows) fifteen were childless in the spring of 1937. Eight of these couples were young people recently married, who still had hopes of bearing children; four of them were old people living alone who had no longer any hope of children; the remaining three had adopted boys. There are also six adult men in Lingthem who were adopted as children.

The arrangements for adopting a child[19] vary according to whether the child is the son of a near relation, of an unrelated person, or an orphan. With a nearly related person the adoption is conducted with little formality; the adopting parents present the real parents with a milch-cow and a new dress for the mother: these

[18] The people of Mayel: see Chapter Nine.

[19] The adopted child is called *kup-tsop*—substitute child—and the adopting parents are called *jiut-bo* and *jiut-mu*; the adopted child addresses them as *abo* and *amu*—father and mother.